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IMPRISONED.

I KNOW how fair the sunset is to-night;
I see its crimson traces on the wall—
I know the western heaven is all alight;
But in this prisoning room I lose it all.

The pattern of the paper on the wall,
The titles of the books along the shelves,
The carpet's woven mazes, one and all
Weary my eyes as they repeat themselves.

Yet nature sends consolers, even here;
Pale, faithful asters, true as love in death,
Come from their autumn haunts, with smiles of cheer,
And sweet red clover wafts its healthful breath.

The gentian brings me, in its chalice blue,
Shut close and cool, a little of the sky;
The golden-rod, resplendent through and through,
Shakes out its yellow sunshine royally;

But all the freedom of the sky and air,
And all the glory of the earth and sea,
The thousand charms which make the world so fair,
And life so sweet—are shut away from me.

All that is fresh and cool on sea or land
Seems from my sense forevermore apart:
The flowers wither in my burning hand,
And tremble with the tumult of my heart.

Not mine the glorious visions which unfold
To saints who waver on life's slippery bound:
I catch no gleam from angels' crowns of gold,
I hear no heavenly harp's melodious sound.

Ah, when these earthly conflicts, fierce and sharp,
Are over, and life's tiresome story told,
I can be glad without the joyful harp,
And satisfied without the crown of gold.

So, if it be my time, let me depart—
My swath is mown, my few poor sheaves are bound—
After the workman's hand has lost its art,
Why should he stay?—why cumber he the ground?
—Elizabeth Akers Allen.

LOST LILLIAN BRACY;

A TRADITION OF CHARLES II.'S TIME.

CHAPTER X.

THE PERIL OF LETTY BRYCE'S LIPS.

FOR many minutes Letty Bryce wrote rapidly, at the table in the old hall of Bracy's Hope, by the torch now flaring somewhat low, apparently copying some of those dangerous papers which she had taken from the carved chest. The small hands that had thus far only been expert at counting and assorting the pieces of linen in the laundry, seemed equally deft at handling the pen; albeit it was evident that the girl wrote under no little excitement, and although once and again she paused for an instant and listened, as she had good warrant to do, in fear that some interruption might come before the completion of that task for which it had cost her so much of time and watching to find an opportunity.

At length—hark!—there were sounds without. Heavy steps came up the hall, and seemed at the door. Not those of Stephen Chester, returning, as the listening ears knew only too well: those, most certainly, either of the master of Bracy's Hope or some other who trode with equal forceful weight. There was even the sound of a hand, apparently at the door, though its opening could not well follow, as it had been locked close behind the servitor. But danger of discovery threatened, in one guise or another; and on the instant of the first sound, the papers were caught from the table with a hand that faltered not even if it trembled—those belonging to herself thrust hurriedly into concealment on her person, and those abstracted thence returned to the chest, the lid closed and fastened, with wondrous speed and so little noise as could not well have been heard by the most attentive ear without.

This done, poor Letty Bryce stood still and trembling by the table, her heart beating wildly, and a semblance of almost pitiful fright on the girlish face, while the hands grasped the discarded slate as if that, at the worst, might furnish some excuse for intrusion beyond her place.

Not too soon; for though the door opened not, the click of metal was heard at another and secret door, hidden in a panel of the corner, and until then unknown to the young girl; and in the next moment, when she had as yet scarce realized the shape of this new danger, the steps sounded within the

apartment instead of without, and Walter Bracy stood before her.

There was reason to believe that he had returned from some revel, beyond the Hope, for his garments seemed not a little in disorder, and his face was flushed as if from wine. That he had not known of the presence of Letty Bryce in the apartment, was sure; for, for the instant, seeing her, his inflamed eyes had the glare of wondering anger, changing only too soon into a far worse and more dangerous expression.

"How now, wench! What do you here?" he demanded, roughly and in hoarse voice.

"Lawk, measter, how feared I was! It be 'ee, measter, for sure and sartin, bean't it, now!" was the reply, the entrapped serving wench ceasing to need any semblance of fright, but seeking by a mighty effort to master herself and to gain time for thought, and for the speech in excuse which must needs follow.

"What do you here, I say? Who gave you right, wench, to be elsewhere at Bracy's Hope than in the laundry or the scullery?" was the harsh repetition of the previous questioning.

"Ees, measter, I will tell 'ee, if, mayhap, 'ee won't be so doleful hard wi' a poor girl—ees! Stephen do see I be so woundy stupid, like, and do tell me to write like him on this big stone board wi' un white marks—ees. It be so still here, like, measter, that I do come here, sometimes, a-tryin' if I can do summat wi' it—don't 'ee see, measter?"

This explanation, perhaps not all arrived at on the instant, but part of a previous thought for use in the event of detection, was accompanied with courtesies, and contortions of the body little else than wriggling, and the putting of a finger in mouth, and all the other accomplishments in deprecation, of poor Letty Bryce; with a bold stroke of finesse to close—nothing less than the attempt to interest the harsh master in the success of her endeavor, by holding up the slate, or more nearly thrusting it into his face, the very simplicity of earnestness in the concluding inquiry:

"I be a doin' of it noice, now—bean't I, measter?"

"Tush, wench, what have I to do with your follies, or those of that crack-brained old fool, Stephen?" was the rough response, with a waving away of the obtruded slate, which was really a dash of impatience and sent it ringing to the floor. "Away with you to the scullery, and at once, before worse happens to you!"

"Ees, measter."

With this stereotyped assurance Letty Bryce started to obey—oh, how quickly and gladly! Not pausing to pick up the slate, she had crossed the apartment, and was indeed at the door, her hand upon it, and the key already turned in the lock, without Walter Bracy being quite aware of the rapidity of her going. Indeed, how could he have been?—for to the brain, heated and no little obscured by wine, had come in that instant one of the very worst temptations of his evil life, muttered below his breath in the words:

"Should this pretty fool have a pair of lips worth the trying? Who knows? Some devil sent her here, into this lonely room, with none other than myself, on purpose to tempt me! And wherefore not? Her baby-face gave her a home in my house: why should it not pay the penalty? You were jealous of her from the first, peeping and spying, were you, Maude Bracy? By the bones of Old Noll, we shall see whether your sight can pierce oaken doors, to know what is passing here! Half a score of kisses, at least, e'en now, as fair earnest of the future!"

Rapidly as the poor girl had crossed the room and come to the very verge of her escape, this rush of mad, unholy thought had been more rapid through the brain of Walter Bracy; and yet was her hand on the lock, and the door unopened though the bolt was moved,—when one fatal order sounded, which she dared not disobey:

"Stop! Come back hither! I have bethought me of an errand to do, before you go."

Stricken by an undefinable fear, and yet with no thought of the danger which really menaced, Letty Bryce returned for a few steps from the door, waiting what she expected to be a command.—To find her arm grasped with a suddenness and a firmness giving no hope of escape, and to hear the breath of the man she so feared, almost at her ear, hissing into it:

"Wench, you would learn to write! There is something else that I would have you learn, instead—nay, that I *will* have you learn—to love!"

A great fear fell upon the young girl—she had been more or less than human, else—a faint sinking of the heart and momentary dying out of the powers of life, in the sudden knowledge of that awful, uncalculated danger, of hearing unholy words and suffering the touch of a bad, reckless man, without the power to resist or resent either! What should she do?—what *could* she do? Her unuttered cry went up; may we not believe that it found an answer in instant inspiration? For in the next moment, even had Walter Bracy passed through many surprises in his hardened life, beyond doubt he then and there found that to surpass them all. He had seized upon a poor, helpless, but innocent victim: he found in his hand, if manner and speech could be credited, one little likely to be a victim, even to him!

"Whoy, measter," came the stunning reply, "what be 'ee a-goin' on in that a-way, for? 'Ee want I for a lass, do 'ee? Well, that bean't so woundy hard, to kiss a gentleman—noa; I did be knowin' all about un, so long ago as I can't tell 'ee—ees!"

"You!" the word of surprise came from the lips of the abuser of the helpless with almost the force of an imprecation. "You—what—you hussy—the love of a gentleman is no novelty to you, it would seem!" In the extremity of his surprise, and perhaps of an actual momentary repugnance, he dropped grasp of her arm. Another surprise followed, scarcely less pronounced than that of the previous moment; for the instant that she found her stratagem in so far successful, and herself free from the hold of the man so dreaded, she turned, with the speed of light, and made for the door, remembering, what her pursuer could not know, that it was unlocked, and intent to open it before he could again reach her, and to flee away down the long hallway, into Maude Bracy's apartment, anywhere and at any risk, so that the touch so feared and hated might be escaped.

CHAPTER XI.

VIOLENT DEEDS AND SUDDEN DEATH.

But, rapidly as the young girl fled from the man of violence, there was lack of speed for the intent. Some faint suspicion that he was about to be foiled by stratagem may have passed through the brain of Walter Bracy, even though heated and a trifle thickened by wine; for before she could do more than reach the door and lay hand upon the lock—before the fastening could be moved and the door opened even one hair's breadth, his rapid step had pursued and overtaken her, and she felt his strong arms about her waist, dragging her back toward the centre of the apartment, while his half-smothered exclamations blended fully awakened passion and ungovernable rage:

"What, minion! you would fly me! By the Lord, scullion, it is a bold game to play, to mock *me* in my own house! God's wounds!—what care I whether you are springald or leman!"

Scarce could one have believed that so much strength lay in the girlish and almost childish figure, as that shown in the despairing and wordless fight for that purity so much dearer than life, as the rude hands dragged her backward from the door and the inflamed countenance of the cruel master looked that fiery love which is a thousand times more deadly than hate, into her own frightened face. But of what avail even that strength, full exerted, against the thews and sinews of the strong man, strengthened even if maddened by the wine he had imbibed? His grasp tightened upon her; he bent down in the effort to force away that unloved bloom from the red lips that so at that moment loathed their very ripeness and the evil attraction they formed.

Then a great cry broke from her, in her despair:

"Oh, no! no! no! Walter Bracy! For the sake of God!"

"What!" again spoke the master, in this still new surprise—"those words, to *me*, and from *you*, wench!" But his hold upon the shrinking form did not relax; and it was a very different voice and manner that the instant after pleaded so pitifully.

"Oh, don't 'ee, measter!—don't 'ee hurt poor Letty, for un love o' heaven! I be so poor and mean, like, measter! Oh, let poor Letty go, won't 'ee, now, please?"

"Silence, minion, or it will be the worse for you!" answered the violent man, literally holding her as in a vise, but, alas!—a vise harder than one of iron, because instinct with human passion and all the devilish impulses in its train.

He forced down his face to hers, in spite of all her

struggles, and the poor girl felt kiss after kiss ravished from her burning cheeks; those struggles only sufficing to defeat the one grand design of Walter Bracy, by keeping the lips buried away from him and thus untouched. Then all the forces of her nature revolted to the last limit of their capacity, and it was almost a literal scream that cried:

"Have done! wretch! monster! if you are not indeed a very fiend, let me go!"

"Peace, minion! peace, I say!" in lower tones and hoarse, but quite as intense, came back the reply; as the now infuriated man closed a hand upon her mouth, in the attempt to stifle what might the next moment be a cry, dangerous even there!

Too late! The hand that would perchance in its mad rage even have crushed out the very breath, had not yet quite closed upon the tortured lips, when from between them issued the sound so dreaded—a cry of agony, given with the full force of the healthful lungs beneath, and ringing through hall and mansion with a strength making secrecy impossible:

"Help! help! oh, help! Mistress Bracy! Stephen! Help! help!"

"I will e'en choke out the life from your carcase, hussy, if you can be stilled in no other way!" cried the now thoroughly demoniac master, making one more effort to close fingers over the mouth, with result of the setting of the white teeth into one of them with a force bringing a groan of pain as the response: this followed by their letting loose, and the repetition of the unconquerable cry:

"Help! help! Mistress Bracy! Help!"

With a curse Walter Bracy loosed his hold and indeed threw her away from him. What act, fatal to the very life yet in his power, might have followed in his exasperation, none can say. For steps were heard in the hall—heard by both the two so singularly consorted; steps, and then voices. An instant more, and the unlocked door was rather burst away from its slight fastenings than opened in the ordinary manner; and then—

Poor Letty Bryce could never have told what of that which followed she saw, or what only fancied that she saw. She could never quite have told, beyond doubt, whether the door was really open and the persons entering recognizable by the maddened man standing in the centre of the apartment, when he drew a pistol from the loose pocket of his doublet, took quick aim at the opening, and fired, with the exclamation, accompanied by a malediction:

"Meddling devils! who bade you interfere? This for the foremost of you!"

That instant, the door now fully open, the pistol fell from the murderous hand, whether in surprise or remorse must ever remain a question to the mere judgments of earth,—and Maude Bracy, followed by Stephen Chester and others of the alarmed household, staggered into the apartment, and fell, a pace or two from the entrance, the life-blood welling from a wound nearly covering the heart, and rather moaning than crying, with her dying breath:

"Oh! Walter Bracy! husband! This, too, from your hand—the hand that I loved so dearly!"

Letty Bryce was on her knees, holding the head of the dying woman, who smiled once upon her, but uttered word no more, and so passed away.

"Mistress! Mistress Maude Bracy!" she cried, in grief and sorrowful amaze. Then, when she saw the last spark of life flicker and expire, she cried again: "Oh, she is dying! Merciful heaven, she is dead!"

The guilty man heard not, or heeded not her words; and truly he heard not those others which followed, but were intended for the All-Hearing ear above:

"Walter Bracy, man of violence and guilt, your last angel has left you! Who shall shelter you, henceforth?"

On the other side of the dying woman, and then of the dead, had also dropped on knee Stephen Chester; and his cry may have sounded more loudly to the ear of the master of Bracy's Hope:

"Measter! oh measter!—what has thee done? Thee has slain the best lady in all the land! She be dead! Oh, mistress, mistress!"

CHAPTER XII.

HOW SIR RALPH EDGE CUMBE PROVED HIS KNIGHTHOOD.

Sir Ralph Edgecumbe was once more approaching Bracy's Hope, four days later than that which had witnessed the rough wooing of Letty Bryce and the sad end of Maude Bracy. Upon what errand he came, again and yet again, with no warrant on the one side

of his inclination, and with much less than warrant on the other, in the fear and hatred held by him toward the violent man who there lorded it so boldly, let his own half-spoken words give answer, as he drew rein, in the early afternoon of that day, on the brow of a slight eminence overlooking the Hope, and in the edge of a coppice bordering the road, at that point visible from the mansion as well as commanding a view of it, and indeed a portion of the grounds often frequented by those there making residence:

"My worst fears have been proven sooth, only too soon," he mused, bridle on neck of his bay, and himself sharing the momentary rest of the steed. "Poor Maude Bracy is dead, and gone away to her burial. Her reckless husband is all the more black and gloomy—I believe me all the more villainous and dangerous. The King's justice may not touch him for the deed; for he has fair excuse that his fatal shot was meant for violent men who had broken in the door of his apartment. Before God, I bethink me, he must one day make a different answer; but this must serve for men, and who shall gainsay his excuse?" A pause, in word, if not in thought; and then the rumination continued, with nevertheless something very different in its scope and in the expression which it brought to the comely face. This latter could scarce have been a blush, for such had disgraced the soldier of the Low Countries; and yet—

"What is to be the fate of that poor girl, who has so twined herself around my heart, spite of her ignorance, that only the saints know if I could live were the cords cut away? Of a truth I dread to think of it, and yet what else can I? Walter Bracy, of a certainty, could have had no good purpose in adding her to his household; and now that poor Maude is gone and no hand is left to shelter her—what now remains? By the blood of the martyr!"—and his hand clutched nervously at the thought—"it was not mine to protect the one of his victims, but let him take heed how he assails the other! Tush!" and the mood of the speaker seemed to change again, with a suddenness not usual to him—"tush! of what was I thinking? Can it be possible that I love the pretty silly wench? No! no! a score of times, No! And yet—. Well," with a sigh of relief at this end of his reflection, "what need to think of all this, at the moment? I go to Bracy's Hope, once more, and only once; when there, let me take note of what may be seen and heard, and do the duty that may appear. What an addle-pate was I, to bethink me so far in advance of the time and necessity."

The knight shook the bridle of his horse, and settled himself anew in the saddle, to ride on to the Hope; but before proceeding a score of hoof-beats in that direction, paused again, looked intently along the road sweeping downward from the rise on which he stood, and again upward to the mansion. What he saw with that long vision, perchance made more extended in view by campaigning, was sufficient to induce the use of that ever-available telescope found in the curved hand shading the eyes; and this exercise, again, gave birth to words strangely connected with the subject of his late and so varied musings:

"Ralph Edgecumbe, truly the fates work for your undoing at the hand of a serving-wench! By this light, it is she approaching; and I—school-brat, fool, gigot that I am!—I am more glad than I might be at the winning of a fight against double number, to see her make approach! Truly, but that I have ridden far and may not be cruel to the good beast that bears me, it were well to turn bridle and ride away again with all speed, before the coming of worse hap that may not be mended!"

He did not ride away: with bridle again dropped on the neck of his trained horse, he waited the coming of what he half-believed, though jeering himself the while, to be his fate. The young girl came rapidly up the slope, however awkward and slouching her gait; and she either saw not the rider, or managed well to conceal her seeing, until she was within a few yards and advancing. Then she stopped short, with finger going to mouth as the most convenient salutation, and a monosyllable, scarcely more advanced in character, a "Whoy!" of the most primitive surprise.

The man who had been a companion of King Charles could not well do less than assist the awkward and awe-stricken young thing with a word, and he could call to mind nothing more appropriate than the natural inquiry, made while unnecessarily alighting from his horse:

"Well, my good girl!—whither away so fast?"

To which the answer was not strictly one, in word:

"La, measter, I be woundy glad to see 'ee! I do ha' summat to say to 'ee, if 'ee don't mind. 'Ee won't be vexed wi' poor Letty for botherin' of 'ee, like, wi' something main queer, like, will 'ee?"

"Vexed, Letty? Oh, no; never believe that I could be vexed with you," was the reassuring reply; but with a painful thought that sorrow if not shame might be involved in this humble appeal to his indulgence. This thought, however, a second look into the sweet brown eyes put away in a moment. "No, Letty, no—believe that I shall be only too glad to do you service, at no matter what cost! What wish you?"

"Ees," was the somewhat inconsequent response, again, "I do be so jolly glad, like, that 'ee don't despise poor I, wi' all un fine clothes, and I so main poor and common! 'Ee be very good, indeed—ees!" And now the brown eyes looked full into those of the knight, to his utter and final discomfiture. Forgetting, for the moment, that the poor wench had signified a desire to consult him on some matter probably very different, he could but hear ringing through his brain the reflection:

"How may a man resist his fate, though he be the bravest and the wisest? This poor girl *is* my fate—I feel and know it beyond all else; poor, half-minded and ignorant as she is!" Almost before he was aware of his own act, he had taken one of those tiny hands, for the time much less soiled than of old, as her raiment was certainly less uncomely; and the fatal words broke irresistibly from lips and heart:

"What would you say to the bluff soldier, Letty, if he told you that he loved you dearly?"

In an instant the hand was disengaged, and Letty Bryce started back a pace, with that in countenance which the "bluff soldier" had small skill to read.

"'Ee is cruel, now, ees!" she said. "'Ee is making a jest o' poor I! Love I—love poor Letty—'ee, a lord, or a sir, or summat like! Oh, noa, noa, don't 'ee say that!" Then the changeable young face caught another expression, which he was quite as powerless to interpret, as she continued: "'Ee said I wasn't old enough to have a chap, yet, for long time, and I must wait—ees; and how can 'ee be my chap a'ready? Don't 'ee mind?"

There was that in this wise simplicity which seemed to complete the subjugation of the knight, if any spark of freedom had indeed before remained. He possessed himself again of the morsel of hand, put it to his lips, as he might have done that of a queen, and said:

"Wait no longer, little Letty, whatever I may have chanced to say on a bygone day. Love me! Love Sir Ralph Edgecumbe, no lord, but a belted knight, who has won his spurs fairly in battle. He will have you taught all that a lady should know, and love you loyally till the day he dies."

There was trouble on the young face, now, that even the straightforward wooer should have been able to read.

"Oh, measter, now I be certain 'ee is trifling wi' poor Letty! 'Ee shouldn't say what is wrong, like, should 'ee?—though I be so main poor and 'ee be so rich and great."

"Wrong, my child?" and the face of the knight was nobly earnest as he spoke. "Wrong? Perish Ralph Edgecumbe's tongue, and the spurs be hacked off his heel, if he speaks of wrong to the young and innocent! No, away with rank, title, everything save my love and the honor that belongs to it! Be my wife, so soon as priest can seal us one."

"Wife? wife?—the wife of Sir Ralph Edgecumbe!"

"Ha! what?" he exclaimed, apparently catching something wondrous in the tone. "Who spoke? But no, my ears must have played me false. My wife, I said, dear Letty, my honored wife."

With the word he put his strong arm around the lithe waist and drew her close. In that moment she was sobbing on his shoulder, but through her sobs came words blending love and fear almost painfully:

"'Ee does make I so happy, to hear 'ee say so—ees; and yet I be so woundy frightened. Let go, now, if 'ee please," and with the request she glided away from his arm. "Don't say aught more, now, don't 'ee, please, measter—I be so scared, like—don't 'ee see?"

The while the wooer's heart was beating with fierce pleasure, alike at the momentary acceptance and the repulse, and saying half-audibly to him:

"She loves me!—by this light she loves me! And yet, poor girl, she is so untutored that she can not



THE CONFESSION.—LUDWIG PASSINI.

e'en tell her own feeling! All the fresher, Ralph Edgumbe, all the fresher in heart and soul—all the more unlike the painted court-beauties of Whitehall and St. Germain, and all the better for thee!"

He lifted her hand, again, with no effort to repossess himself of the form so near him—once more kissed it with the respect that might have been due to his queen, and said, in a voice of deep feeling:

"The lady hath right to command her servant,

ever; and you are the lady of his love, to Ralph Edgumbe, henceforth, as—God's truth he scarcely knew so much!—you have been since the first day that he set eyes on you. Not another word do I utter, then, if I may speak again and more as becomes my feeling, at fitter time and fitter place. Have I that permission, Letty—sweet Letty, if I have enough proved love and faith to call you so?"

Sir Ralph Edgumbe was not of those quick-wit-

ted and subtle: else might he have seen that only the most rigid of restraints kept Letty Bryce herself, and his neck unfettered by a chain the hardest to break of all forged on earth. That restraint was maintained, however, in an interest greater than he knew: the hour was near, when he would almost have chosen rather to lose spur from heel, than to have changed one action of that supreme moment.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]